Waiting for GOOD DOUGH

A Brooklyn ex-pat’s carb-fueled quest to find a slice of home in the Triangle

BY ANDREA RICE
Pizza is home.
My husband and I moved to Raleigh from Brooklyn eighteen months ago, and I’ve been looking for pizza that reminded me of home ever since. Wherever you’re from, you’ve probably done the same. Maybe it’s the greasy 1:00 a.m. slice you devoured at Joe’s in NYC; the crispy, thick crust you grew up with in Detroit; or even your great-grandmother’s family recipe—whatever that memory is, that’s what you’ll associate with good pizza.

Pizza is a feeling.
It’s familiar, comforting. It makes us happy. It brings us together, offers us a sense of community, of family—la famiglia—as it has for centuries.

Pizza is local.
Or it becomes local. Take Annamaria’s Pizza House, known as “Bat’s,” started by a New Jersey couple in 1956 after they moved to Durham so their critically ill three-year-old daughter could get medical treatment at Duke. (She survived.) Annamaria’s was likely the Triangle’s first pizza joint—pizza was new to the South—popular among Duke students until it closed (and the property sold and razed) in 1986. Like Bartholomew and Annamaria Malanga, many of those students were from up North. They, too, were looking for a slice of home.

Ralph Ottaviano still is.
A second-generation Italian-American whose parents immigrated from Naples, the New York native says that soon after he moved to Raleigh, about a decade ago, he began running into fellow Northeastern ex-pats who’ve found camaraderie in the search for a pie that gets it just right.

“We all seem to come down here and find each other,” he told me recently, “wondering where to find the good dough.”

I’d been wondering the same thing. And that’s how this story began.

My goal wasn’t to declare this or that pie the “best.” Pizza, after all, is diverse and subjective (see “Pizza’s Evolutionary Tree,” page 14). What you and I look for in our ideal slices are likely very different—brick-thick crust or cracker-crisp, red sauce or white, sparse toppings or loaded.

But I’d argue there are four general criteria we can use to evaluate a pie: the crust, the sauce, the toppings, and, well, the grease.

The crust: Would you eat it or leave it? Is it appropriately thin and crispy with a good char (or, depending on the style, thick, bready, and glutinous)? Does it have crumb—a baker’s term for pockets of air that appear during the baking process?

The sauce: Is it zingy and zesty, or bland and tomato-y, like Spaghettios?

The toppings: Whether sourced locally or imported from Italy, high-quality toppings can mean the difference between a release of dopamine and a bout of acid reflux.

The grease: Don’t shoot the messenger, but grease is bad for you. For me—and your gastrointestinal tract—less is more.

Over the last few months, I’ve eaten a lot of pizza. Great pizza, fine pizza, bad pizza (it exists), pizza that made me sick (although, given my pizza-heavy diet, that might not be the pizza’s fault). I ate pies in restaurants with wine lists and slices from holes-in-the-wall. I had pizza in every
shape and style imaginable, including some I’d never heard of before.

I didn’t visit every pizza place in the Triangle; that would’ve been impossible, perhaps fatal. I mostly abstained from national chains (sorry, Mellow Mushroom), except for a few that offered select regional styles. And I no doubt overlooked some neighborhood gems that aren’t on the foodie radar.

But I didn’t set out to create an exhaustive or definitive list of good pizza. Instead, I tried to capture a snapshot of a surprisingly complex, constantly evolving scene: twenty-six restaurants comprising a mix of styles and stories from natives, Italians, New Yorkers, and other Northeasterners who are shaping the Triangle’s dough culture.

Along the way, this journey taught me more than I ever thought possible about the art of the pie—and humbled my inner Brooklyn Pizza Snob.

Good dough, I learned, does, in fact, exist outside of New York. It even exists here. Somehow, that’s made the Triangle feel all the more like home.

HOW IT WORKS

This list is organized by the styles of pizza I sampled. There’s some crossover among styles: I got a Sicilian slice at a place that also makes Neapolitan pies, for instance.

I rated each pizza on the Four Essential Criteria—crust, sauce, toppings, and grease—on a scale of 1–5, from anger-inducing (1) to pleasurable-bordering-on-orgasmic (5). The tricky one is grease, because, as we’ve established, less is more. For consistency, less grease, being good, gets a higher rating. Apologies in advance for any confusion.

For those with sensitivities and dietary restrictions, I’ve also included places with gluten-free and vegan options on the menu.

**Neapolitan**

ABOUT THE STYLE: In 1889, King Umberto I and Queen Margherita of Savoy visited Naples, dined at Pizzeria Brandi, and, as legend goes, asked the pizzaiolo, Raffaele Esposito, to the Royal Palace of Capodimonte to make pizzas for them. He crafted a simple pie of basil, mozzarella, and tomatoes, the Pizza Margherita—its green, white, and red ingredients an image of the Italian flag. Neapolitan-style pizza was revered as the best in Italy. True pizza Napoletana uses fresh basil and mozzarella and pureed San Marzano tomatoes. The dough is strictly zero or doppio zero Caputo flour, a finely milled refined wheat flour native to the region, with brewer’s yeast as a rising agent. It’s classically kneaded and shaped by hand, never rolled out. Neapolitan pizzas are typically ten to twelve inches and baked in a blazing wood-fired oven for sixty to ninety seconds.

**NAPOLI CAFE & GELATERIA**

105 East Main Street, Carrboro
napolicarrboro.com

CRUST 🌯
SAUCE 🍅
TOPPINGS 🍂
GREASE 🍳

It took me a moment to realize there was no kitchen: the pizzas were coming in from the Napoli food truck outside, which has a wood-fired oven inside. Patrons were lined up out the door all night, and most took their pies to go. Here, the Napoli—San Marzano tomato sauce, Fior di Latte, Italian anchovy fillets, capers, shaved Grana Padano, basil, and Calabrian chili oil—was wonderfully charred. Though the dough—chewy, light, and crisp—was slightly thicker than other Neapolitans, it was easier to pick up, an advantage for a self-sufficient, DIY establishment where you grab your own plates, napkins, water, and even to-go boxes.

**PIZZA LA STELLA (GF) (V)**

Locations in Raleigh and Cary
pizzalastella.com

CRUST 🌯
SAUCE 🍅
TOPPINGS 🍂
GREASE 🍳

Pizza La Stella’s website boasts that it’s the only pizzeria in North Carolina with the official Associazione Verace Pizza Napoletana certification. It’s not; Treforni has one, too (see below). But Stella does have several seven-thousand-pound, wood-burning imported Stefano Ferrara ovens. Maybe that’s why this two-location spot announced in July that it’s getting a full pizza and menu makeover in August. My first experience for lunch was more crust than pizza—thick, bready, cold, and slightly underdone. I’ll give it another go after the overhaul.
In 2017, chef-owners Zach and Amber Faulisi, who met at culinary school in Pittsburgh, opened Pizzeria Faulisi. Amber taught herself how to make pizza at home in an electric oven while Zach was a chef at The Durham. The mosaic-tiled, wood-fired Napoli oven bakes the doughy disks, a hybrid of Caputo flour and freshly milled flour from Boulted Bread, to charred perfection. The mozzarella comes from Wisconsin’s Crave Brothers; the unfussy sauce, San Marzano tomatoes, and salt is aromatic and flavorful. The center gets a bit soupy, making each slice, which can be eaten in three or four bites, a little on the flimsy side, but that’s part of the fun. Start with the wood-fired Caesar cauliflower, then move on to the Margherita and the Funghi, a white pie with cremini and shiitake mushrooms, red onions, mascarpone, and mozzarella.

**POMPIERI PIZZA** (GF) (V)

102 City Hall Plaza, Durham
pompieripizza.com

*CRUST* 

*SAUCE* 

*TOPPINGS* 

*GREASE* 

“A Pizza is secretly a taco,” our server told us. I began cutting into a crisp, smoldering twelve-incher with kitchen shears as she explained that we could always just pick it up and fold it in half. Previously a Durham firehouse, Pompieri (Italian for “firefighter”) explores the theme of heat. The namesake pie was covered with hot peppers and chili oil. A quote from an *INDY* review adorned the wall beneath a devil’s mask: “Pizza should arrive as a snack. By the mid-1900s, bakers began making bread with a longer fermentation process. Brushed with olive oil, sea salt, and rosemary, it was eaten for breakfast or as a snack. By the mid-1900s, bakers began producing artisanal bread with a longer fermentation process, resembling the thicker, focaccia-like pizza Romana of today: al taglio (by the rectangular slice) and tonda (whole thin-crust rounds). Unlike Neapolitan pizza, the godfather of pizza ulo, Roman-style pizza-making is not recognized by UNESCO as an intangible cultural heritage.

**TREFORNI NEAPOLITAN PIZZA** (GF)

1125 West N.C. Highway 54, Durham
treforni.com

*CRUST* 

*SAUCE* 

*TOPPINGS* 

*GREASE* 

Watching the three nine-hundred-degree Napoli ovens in action at this flashy, family-oriented pizza restaurant—which also has an AVPN certification—makes you forget you’re inside a Hope Valley strip mall. Chef and co-owner Dave Diggins studied with Roberto Caporuscio, who learned pie-making at the nearly 120-year-old Pizzeria Starita in Naples. Diggins has perfected the art of the light-as-air, chewy crust. We washed down the Prosciutto Arugula—mozzarella, prosciutto di parma, arugula, pecorino romano, and basil—with a dry and fruity Lambrusco dei Portici.

**POOLE’SIDE PIES** (opening late summer)

428 South McDowell Street, Raleigh
ac-restaurants.com/poolside

(No sample available.)

A Neapolitan-inspired, swim club-themed spot, Poole’s Pies will open later this summer adjacent to Poole’s Diner, the latest concept from James Beard winner Ashley Christensen. “Pizza is approachable,” she told me in an email. “And excellent pizza is all in the details.” For Christensen, good pizza is about striking a balance between traditional and experimental. The formula for the dough is still a work in progress, but Christensen says that she’s been most inspired by places that have nailed the Napoletana-style crust.
of grease following its path. Despite its density, it was shockingly lightweight to eat and on the drier side, with a flavorful and zesty sauce.

New York

ABOUT THE STYLE: Baker Anthony “Totonno” Pero and grocer Gennaro Lombardi, both Italian immigrants, reportedly opened the first pizza restaurant in the U.S. in 1905—and Lombardi is credited with creating the first New York slice in his brick-walled coal oven, an American adaptation of pizza Napoletana. The modern New York slice is typically baked in a gas oven that heats the pie from the top and bottom to release the trademark grease. Its notoriously large, thin, and crispy crust gets tossed by hand, often overhead, and is sturdy enough to pick up and eat off a paper plate but malleable enough to fold in half. (Eat it with a knife and fork, and you’ll be publicly shamed). Grandma-style pizza also comes from New York, a thin-crust square or rectangular pizza heralding from Long Island, a modification by Italian housewives who lacked a proper pizza oven. Baked in a pan, its square shape is often compared to a Sicilian, though the crust, texture, toppings, and slight sweetness are distinct.

FRANK’S PIZZA & RESTAURANT
2030 New Bern Avenue, Raleigh
frankspizzainraleigh.com

CRUST 🍗
SAUCE 🍅
TOPPINGS 🍔
GREASE 🧼

Nestled in an unassuming strip mall in Southeast Raleigh, Frank’s dining area has a romantic quality reminiscent of an old-school Italian joint in South Brooklyn. Frank’s does the dough the way New York intended: strong and bready, dense, chewy, and delightfully greasy—a job for at least two heavy-duty paper towels.

HUTCHINS GARAGE (GF) (V)
402 West Geer Street, Durham

CRUST 🍗
SAUCE 🍅
TOPPINGS 🍔
GREASE 🧼

This funky converted garage space, from the owners of Bull McCabes and former Pizzeria Toro chef Michael Morrone, slings both New York-style Margherita wheels and Grandma-style rectangles. Be it an on-the-menu white pie with cremini and shiitake mushrooms, sweet onions, and smoked mozzarella and parmesan, or a DIY Margherita with Fresno chiles, anchovies, and kalamata olives, the crust is well-constructed and crunchy, even slightly sweet and nutty like pastry dough. These pies retain their visual appeal from start to finish, though they’re much better eaten while hot.
In 1990, Salvatore “Rino” Fevola swapped the crowds of Naples for the more open spaces of the Triangle, working his way through Italian restaurants like Pulcinella's in Durham before opening Magone in Chapel Hill in 2015. Fevola says his thin-crust, Neapolitan-inspired pizzas are actually New York-style since he uses a gas oven instead of brick. He's spent time tasting slices around the Big Apple to develop his own take. The Margherita was easy to pick up (I ate one while driving), and I could still detect those authentic Napoletana flavors even though it lacked the trademark wood-fired crisp and airy crumb. Fevola says he isn't interested in imitating the original. Most Americans, at least around here, don't know the real thing, he told me. “It’s getting there,” he says. “But it needs another ten years before people realize the difference.”

**Oakwood Pizza Box**

610 North Person Street, Raleigh

Oakwoodpizzabox.com

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OAKWOOD PIZZA BOX (GF)

610 North Person Street, Raleigh

oakwoodpizzabox.com

Long Island native Anthony Guerra wields large wheels of thin-crust New York magic made from doppio zero flour, baked to a crisp in a gas deck oven at seven hundred degrees for five to six minutes. (He also uses what he describes as a “pretty dope” gluten-free dough, made from rice flour and potato starch, to give it the texture and chew of regular dough, baked to a crisp in olive oil.) One pie will feed three to four people—and you can customize your toppings however you like; there’s only a few to choose from. We got a half-red with peppers and leafy greens, and half-white with meatballs.

**THE PIZZA TIMES**

210 South Wilmington Street, Raleigh

raleightimespizza.com

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From the owners of The Raleigh Times, The Pizza Times is your average NY-style pedestrian pie by the slice—if you don’t mind a little indigestion followed by a food coma. The non-stretchy, generous layers of cheese coagulate to form an amoebic entity, which makes for less mess for eating on the go. The dough gets the authentic New York hand-tossed-and-stretched treatment, baked in a gas oven until golden brown. At $2.50 plus toppings, you can’t really beat the price, though you get what you pay for.
RUCKUS PIZZA AND BAR
Multiple locations
ruckuspizza.com

CRUST
SAUCE
TOPPINGS
GREASE

I was pleasantly surprised by this collegiate paradise’s large NY slice, rolled out ultra-thin and cut to an unusual, oblong slant that measured nearly fifteen inches on its longest side. The dough, a close cousin of unleavened bread, was beautifully browned on the bottom, but devoid of the air bubbles that percolate with a good char. Banana peppers added an element of zing to an otherwise milder sauce. Three bucks will get you the aptly named Huge Slice, a wedge so big you might have to cut it in half before you pick it up and fold it.

SAL’S PIZZA AND RISTORANTE
2805 Homestead Road, Chapel Hill
salspizzaoachapelhill.com

CRUST
SAUCE
TOPPINGS
GREASE

Maybe it’s the oversized photo of the Cinque Terre or the cliché black-and-white shot of the Brooklyn Bridge, but there’s a vacation-like atmosphere of Sal’s Pizza, maybe the closest thing to a legit New York slice I found on my adventure. For $1.95, I got a cheese slice and added anchovies and kalamata olives, an odd, salty pairing may have overpowered the light sauce. The dough was rolled out like a crepe, and the crust was somehow as airy as it was dense, denoting serious craftsmanship.

VIVO RISTORANTE PIZZERIA (GF)
7400 Six Forks Road, #2, Raleigh
vivoraleigh.com

CRUST
SAUCE
TOPPINGS
GREASE

Rome-born Gianni Cinelli’s family recipe for the Grandma Margherita landed in North Raleigh by way of New York more than twenty years ago. Baked in anodized square pans, this Grandma is rich with extra virgin olive oil, yielding a crisp, ultra-thin crust. Jackie Martin Maloney, a Manhattan transplant and self-described pizza snob, told me it doesn’t get much better than the Grandma at this rustic Italian restaurant: “To me, good pizza is thin, crispy, garlicky, greasy—typical NYC pizza.”

Chicago

ABOUT THE STYLE: Chicago is best known for a deep-dish, high-edged-pan interpretation of a heavy Midwestern casserole assembled from the inside-out: cheese and toppings on the bottom, sauce on top. Its precise origin is unknown, though many trace its birth to Pizzeria Uno in Chicago in 1943.

NANCY’S PIZZERIA (GF)
8111 Creedmoor Road, Raleigh (multiple locations nationwide)
nancyspizza.com

CRUST
SAUCE
TOPPINGS
GREASE

The Triangle’s closest link to deep-dish Chicago pies is on Creedmoor Road, part of a chain that claims to have invented the stuffed pizza in 1971. These dense pies eat like a quiche: A river of molten hot cheese ran through the middle of a small but mighty six-inch personal pie, weaving amid Giardina peppers and mushrooms and a thick, chunky red sauce. This was somehow the “Stuffed Lighter” version—and it was dangerously good.

ABOUT THE STYLE: These well-oiled, thick-crust square or rectangular pies are crispier than New York or Chicago-style, and come from Sicilian lineage. Detroit-style pizza was born in 1946 and developed by Gus Guerra, a bar owner who adapted his Italian mother-in-law’s recipe.

JET’S PIZZA (GF)
Multiple locations in Raleigh and Cary
jetspizza.com

CRUST
SAUCE
TOPPINGS
GREASE

If Jet’s conjures memories of Little Caesar’s, that’s because both pizza empires originated in Detroit. This crust gets its crisp from an oiled skillet. Thick but springy, Jet’s is the only Detroit-style dough in the Triangle (there are three locations in Raleigh and Cary); for a national chain, it’s quite tasty. The pizza runs to the edges on these pies, an infinity pool of cheese, green peppers, black olives, and mushrooms. And despite being so thick, it wasn’t like eating a brick.

Detroit-style eight-corner pepperoni from Jet’s Pizza
PHOTO COURTESY OF JET’S PIZZA

A BRIEF GUIDE TO PIZZA

Pizza /ˈpɛtsə/ (noun): a usually large open pie made typically of thinly rolled bread dough spread with a spiced mixture (as of tomatoes, cheese, ground meat, garlic, oil) and baked

Origin: Italian (“pie”), from (assumed) Vulgar Latin pīca.

Birthplace: Though historians credit Naples, Italy—which began as a Greek settlement around 600 BCE—with the invention of pizza in the eighteenth century, the earliest documentation of the word, or its linguistic predecessor, dates almost a millennium earlier, to 997 CE in Gaeta, another Greek settlement on the central coast of present-day Italy. This version of pizza did not contain tomatoes, which are native to Peru and didn’t appear in Europe until the 1500s.

Adaptation: When they were first introduced, tomatoes made many medieval Italians ill. It took them nearly two centuries to adapt to the nightshade, which was originally thought poisonous. The vegetable did not routinely appear in Italian recipes until the mid-eighteenth century. But as tomatoes made their way into working-class Napoli households, which had minimal provisions of flour, olive oil, and cheese, the modern pizza began to develop.

The First Pizzeria: Antica Pizzeria Port’Alba, in Naples, established in 1838, is considered the world’s oldest pizzeria. It’s still open today.

The First Pizza Margherita: Pizzeria Pietro e Basta Cosi—which translates to “the pizzeria of Peter, and that’s enough”—opened in Naples in 1780. When Enrico Brandi took it over, it became Pizzeria Brandi, where the Margherita pizza was born. It’s also still in operation.

The First American Pizzeria: The most common story goes like this: In 1905, as waves of Italian immigrants arrived at Ellis Island, the first American pizzeria opened in New York, a partnership between baker Anthony “Totonno” Perri and grocer Gennaro Lombardi, both immigrants from Naples; Lombardi later created the famed NY slice. But this narrative is disputed. According to pizza historian Peter Regas, newly unearthed evidence indicates that an Italian baker named Filippo Milone started six pizzerias in New York beginning in the 1890s, three of which—including Lombardi’s—became famous under someone else’s name (and two of which still exist).

The First Triangle Pizzeria: Annamaria’s Pizza House, opened near Duke University in 1956 by two New Jersey transplants, was probably the area’s first pizza joint. It was soon followed by Brothers Pizza in Raleigh, then countless others.

ABOUT THE STYLE: In Connecticut, New Haven-style pizza, also known as “apizza,” is a big deal. It’s a first cousin of Neapolitan pizza, with a hotter, crispier, and even thinner coal-fired crust, borne out of Frank Pepe Pizzeria Napoletana in 1925.

CAPP’S PIZZERIA & TRATTORIA
79 Falling Springs Drive, #140, Chapel Hill
cappspizzeria.com

CRUST

SAUCE

TOPPINGS

GREASE

Though CAPP’s touts its Neapolitan-style rounds, its menu also features four classic apizzas, like the Napoli, with crushed tomato, garlic, red onion, mozzarella, Agostino Recca anchovy, capers, and oregano. Chef-owner John Cappelletti, from Connecticut, sources his ingredients locally and crafts his dough with a blend of organic bread flour from Lindley Mills, Caputo-brand 00 flour, and milled hard wheat. The crust gets its trademark blackened char from the Vesuvio II, a hickory-burning oven.

Virginia

ABOUT THE STYLE: These twenty-eight-inch (!) monsters are all over Virginia, as well as West Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Pennsylvania. They’re so huge that the crust is naturally thinner, like New York-style on steroids. That’s out of necessity, since one pie is enough to feed a platoon.

Al Kapherr, a regular at Benny Capitale’s on Fayetteville Street, holds a slice of the Virginia-style pizza. PHOTO BY ANDREA RICE
There's a certain freak-show appeal of a slice so big you need several paper plates and both hands just to hold it. Indeed, Polaroids of giant-slice fans holding their prize like a big sea bass adorn the walls of Benny Capitale's, which is something of a family-friendly tourist attraction. This slice was so big I didn't know where to begin—and the crust was, unsurprisingly, underdone. Is it possible to bake a pie that big all the way through without burning it?

ABOUT THE STYLE: Not every pizzeria strives to emulate something else. Lots of chefs are creating new pizza paradigms by borrowing from multiple influences to craft something all their own—including in the Triangle.

LILLY'S: “ORGANIC STYLE” (GF) (V)
1813 Glenwood Avenue, Raleigh
lillyspizza.com

Since 1993, John Garrison’s Five Points neighborhood joint has prided itself on staying as organic, fresh, and local as possible. With artisanal cheeses and a signature made-from-scratch sauce, these pies are thick like focaccia, heavy like lasagna, and sweet like honey. Lilly’s chunky statement toppings—smoked oysters, Siler City country ham, chipotle peppers, roasted potatoes, straw mushrooms—lend these pizzas extra heft. And the eye candy of the carnivalesque atmosphere gives you something to look at (other than your phone) while you wait.

RADIUS PIZZERIA & PUB:
“BRICK-OVEN STYLE” (GF) (V)
112 North Churton Street, Hillsborough
radiuspizzeria.net

The nine- and twelve-inch rounds of fermented sourdough here won me over, particularly when topped with pesto, mushrooms, garlic, parmesan, and arugula. You won't find any crumb in this flatbread-style crust; the deep-brown dough is dry, more like socca or matzo than pizza, but it works. The gluten-free parmesan baked crust—tapioca flour, eggs, herb oil—is basically a sturdy cracker. My server told me that maybe a quarter of the pizzas ordered at Radius are gluten-free.

TROPHY PIZZA:
“BEER-LOVERS’ STYLE” (V)
827 West Morgan Street, Raleigh
trophybrewing.com/the-pizza

Trophy's creative pizzas, always designed with beer pairings in mind, aren't afraid of experimentation. With baseball-size crusty bubbles, the substantial dough had serious crumb—crunchy, salty, and spongy. The heat from the Daredevil—fire-roasted tomato sauce, mozzarella, ghost pepper salami, jalapeño, caramelized onions, Sriracha—will make you sweat. The Most Loyal—basil pesto, mozzarella, roasted chicken, Roma tomatoes—featured a pleasure-inducing touch of honey, the kind of decadence that puts you in a catatonic state.

PIZZERIA MERCATO:
“AMERICANA STYLE”
408 West Weaver Street, Carrboro
pizzeriamercatonc.com

Gabe Barker, the son of James Beard Award-winning chefs Ben and Karen Barker, describes his pies at Mercato as “Americana”—pizzas that draw on multiple influences to create something unique. “Pizza to me is inclusive,” he says. The dough is blended with Caputo flour, bread flour, and a starter to create a chewier, sturdier crust. Barker says Mercato’s pizzas have something akin to a traditional Neapolitan crust but bake more like New York-style. I stopped by Mercato for takeout early on a Friday evening, and the dining room was nearly full. I ordered the Puttanesca with tomato, anchovy, olives, capers, chile, garlic, and Fior di Latte. They had to remake my pie after it emerged from the oven with cheese that hadn't been distributed properly. I'm glad they did. I reheated one slice with an egg on it for breakfast the next day; my husband ate the other cold. We were both happy.
Williamson’s “Durham Style” (GF) (V)
117 West Main Street, Suite A, Durham
piepushers.com

CRUST 🍕鲈鱼
SAUCE 🍅酸菜
TOPPINGS 🍕鲈鱼
GREASE 🍫鲈鱼

“Neither one of us are from New York, so why claim that heritage?” says co-owner Becky Hacker, who runs Pie Pushers with her husband, chef Mike Hacker. When the pair first started Pie Pushers as a food truck eight years ago, they never had any intention of doing so, though they do borrow from aspects of the New York tradition. “Durham loves doing things their own way,” she says. Pie Pushers’ bready, Sicilian-inspired square style comes in eight or sixteen slices, while the thin, hand-tossed crust, despite not receiving official the official New York designation, is just greasy enough to come close. This is simple, easy pizza, ideal for quick lunches or late nights. Try a Pace Car—corn mix, basil, jalapeños, parmesan, mozzarella.

Pizzeria Toro: “Toro-style” (V)
105 East Chapel Hill Street, Durham
pizzeriatoro.com

CRUST 🍕鲈鱼
SAUCE 🍅酸菜
TOPPINGS 🍕鲈鱼
GREASE 🍫鲈鱼

“Pizza puts everyone in a good mood,” says chef-owner Gray Brooks, removing a charred San Marzano tomato and buffalo mozzarella pie from the wood-fired ceramic oven. “It’s the one single food that people from age four to ninety-four will always love eating.” At Toro, it’s all about the crumb. Try any pie on this seasonally rotating menu, and you won’t be disappointed, especially when doused with Calabrian chili-infused sunflower oil. Brooks experimented with different flours until he found one with the right levels of protein, a blend sourced from Lindley Mills in Graham and high-gluten flour from King Arthur. His hand-tossed pies puff up in seven minutes at 650 degrees (the more gluten in the flour, the longer the cooking time), and they’re removed from the oven before the cheese, which gets added halfway through the firing time, has a chance to separate, which Brooks calls a big no-no. Most of the cheese, like the mozzarella di bufala, he says, comes straight from Italy. Another key is the deceptively simple sauce—olive oil, garlic, San Marzano tomatoes, salt and pepper, and other wizardry.

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